

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY HISTORY

The Army's EO Program was born in response to violent confrontations that erupted between racial and ethnic groups at posts and installations in the Continental United States and at overseas locations in 1969 and 1970. Many believed that these violent eruptions were in response to earlier race riots that had taken place in almost every major city across the country.

After numerous reports, task force studies, and Soldier surveys, the one issue that permeated all findings was the actual or perceived issue of discrimination. Soldiers' morale was at an all time low, and a significant failure of communication existed across racial lines. These issues seriously jeopardized mission effectiveness and adversely undermined the Army's combat readiness.

The earliest attempt to institutionalize EO in the Army probably began with President Truman's Executive Order to desegregate the services in 1948. However, the 22 years that followed saw no significant, deliberate, well-conceived plan or program to check systematic discrimination and other forms of unequal treatment. Since 1970, the Army has been engaged in a program designed to ensure and improve combat readiness through an effective EO program. Today, many of our military leaders believe that this program has had a far-reaching impact on the Army's culture, a culture that serves as a role model for the rest of the nation.

The situation in today's Army is clearly much different from what existed years ago. Many changes have occurred, moving the Army's EO program from a strictly educational and training initiative to a multifaceted management program with clear goals and objectives. These goals and objectives are also an integral part of human relations and are nurtured and developed through a professional military education system.

The Army's EO program has had a great deal of success over the past 30 years plus, but much remains to be done. Ultimately, what commanders and subordinate leaders do today will determine the Army's continued success for years to come. Today's commander has a better historical perspective on the potential price that is paid when issues of discrimination or sexual harassment are not swiftly addressed and dealt with.
